

## ***Beating of Queens Satanist Prompts Hate Crime Charges***

**By Corey Kilgannon**

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Ever since he was 12, Daniel Romano has cut a noticeable figure around Middle Village, a working class part of Queens. Mr. Romano, 20, who calls himself a Satanist, stands out, with his blue-tinted bouffant hairdo, his black clothing and fingernails, and the prominent crucifix, worn upside down.

Mr. Romano has long been teased for dressing like a "gothic kid" or simply a "goth," in a community with small homes, neat lawns and populated with many Roman Catholics.

But in recent weeks, two local teenagers began fixating on Mr. Romano, calling him names including "Satan worshiper," "baby sacrificer" and "hooker killer," the authorities say. On Sunday the verbal harassment turned into violence.

Mr. Romano, while walking on 72nd Street in Maspeth, was attacked by the two teenagers, the authorities say. Yesterday the Queens district attorney, Richard A. Brown, announced that the young men, Paul C. Rotondi and Frank M. Scarpinito, both 18 and from Middle Village, would be charged with hate crimes, which carry harsher penalties and are usually leveled when an attack involves a victim's ethnicity, religion or sexual orientation.

Prosecutors say they attacked Mr. Romano because of his religious beliefs: They thought he worshiped Satan. They were arraigned yesterday on charges of second-degree assault as a hate crime, possession of a weapon and aggravated harassment. The charges could carry prison terms of up to 15 years.

About 2 p.m. on Sunday, prosecutors say, the teenagers pulled up in a car and one yelled to Mr. Romano, "Hey, Satan!"

The authorities said that both defendants then attacked Mr. Romano -- Mr. Rotondi using a metal club, and Mr. Scarpinito wielding an ice scraper. Mr. Romano was taken to Elmhurst Hospital Center, where he received 12 stitches. On Monday, he filed a complaint with police officers, who arrested the two youths.

At their arraignment yesterday, prosecutors asked that they be held in \$75,000 bail, but a

judge set it at \$5,000 and they were released. An assistant district attorney, George J. Farrugia, said the defendants believed that Mr. Romano worshiped Satan and "over the last month and a half, they have had it in for this kid, and have been abusive."

Mr. Scarpinito's lawyer, Richard Leff, called the charges "an abuse of the hate crime status," and said his client had never been in trouble. Mr. Rotondi's lawyer, Sean A. McNicholas, said prosecutors were calling this a hate crime because of "politics and press."

"The kid is gothic with blue hair: He falls into a category of kid," Mr. McNicholas said. "At worst, this is a simple dispute between kids, not an attack on a minority."

"If the accusation was that he was black or Asian or Latino or Jewish, it's one thing," he said. "They see this as a religious practice. It's a dispute between kids, the same way you have the nerds, the jocks, the artsy kids and the teacher's pets. What's next? Someone being accused of attacking a preppie, or a nerd?"

In an interview last night at his apartment, which he shares with his mother, Mr. Romano said that he was raised Catholic but is now a Satanist. A hard rock musician, he attended Talent Unlimited High School in Manhattan and leads a band.

Mr. Romano said he was working at a bagel store last summer when Mr. Scarpinito, who worked next door at a hardware store, began making fun of him.

"My allegiance is to Satan and I hate Christianity, Judaism and Islam, but I don't hurt anyone," Mr. Romano said. "I take out my anger in mosh pits and S-and-M clubs. I think it's ironic that the Christians got violent with the Satanist."

His mother, Debbie Romano, 48, said, "I'm a Christian, but he went the other way; I don't understand his beliefs, but he doesn't hurt nobody."